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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that a major review of the theory of educational administration is required if it is to regain a credible role in academic and practical circles. The argument, which considers the case of regional directors in Victoria, Australia (a role similarly endangered on present assumptions and trends), has four major parts. First is a brief summary of some reasons why the dominant theoretical perspective of the field is losing the credibility it once had. Second is a description of the context of a case study about what it is, or was, to be a regional director of education (RDE). Third are some of the major practical and theoretical implications of the case study and how they relate to other recent research projects. Fourth, on these bases, it is proposed that a new practical theory of educational administration will require a nonfoundational epistemology, a Deweyan moral theory, as well as an econopolitical and sociological imagination. (Author/RG)

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VICTORIA'S REGIONAL DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION AND THE THEORY OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: ENDANGERED SPECIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that a major review of the theory of educational administration is required if it is to regain a credible role in academic and practical circles. It does this by considering the case of regional directors in Victoria, Australia, a role similarly endangered on present assumptions and trends.

The argument has four major parts. First is a brief summary of some reasons why the dominant theoretical perspective of the field is losing the credibility it once had. Second is a description of the context of a case study about what it is, or was, to be a regional director of education (RDE). Third are some of the major practical and theoretical implications of the case study and how they relate to other recent research projects. Four, on these bases, it is proposed that a new practical theory of *educative* administration will require a non-foundational epistemology, a Deweyan moral theory as well as an econo-political and sociological imagination.

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THE CRIPPLED THEORETICAL CONTEXT

One by one, since the 1970's, the wheels have fallen off the management science vehicle (Hoy and Miskel, 1982) for theory in educational administration. First to go was the natural systems ideology (Greenfield, 1975).

that sustained four myths about educational organizations: that they are not human inventions or cultural artifacts but real organisms with a life of their own; that as natural systems they are ultimately knowable given the tools of natural science, especially logical empiricism; that administrative practice reflects and is justified by the values of the organization; and that practice can be understood in terms of tasks packaged as roles, roles aggregated as structure, and structure interpreted as the patterns of staff and line relationships intended to achieve mandated purposes.

The second wheel to fall off was the ideology of structural-functionalism which legitimated (Bates, 1984) a bureaucratic rationality (Rizvi, 1984). Theorists and practitioners began to question the extent to which psychologistic thinking reduced and personalized complex problems in education and how determinism was being used widely to explain politically and historically complex educational problems in terms of determining characteristics of (say) leadership and followership. Systematically avoided were the origins of mindsets, the guarded access to power and other resources, and the shrouded and inequitable outcomes of education. A sociological imagination (Mills, 1970) swept educational administration creating new forms of historical, anthropological and critical sensitivity.

The third wheel to fall off was the management myth; the unquestioning belief that managers in education, by dint of positional authority and managerial technique, were educationally reformist. We now look instead to the complex cultural processes whereby new knowledge and understandings are created and negotiated to partially resolve old moral dilemmas in education. Sadly, what counts as 'effective' and 'educative' leadership action tends to reflect the shifts in the econo-political contexts of education rather than the development of new and comprehensive theories of value.

As these wheels fell off, the theory-practice gap widened. There was increasing disquiet about the value of theory itself as the vehicle sank lower under the weight of existential, socially-critical and epistemological critique. As the theorists turned in on themselves in the 1980s, practitioners' empirical realities and contexts were seen less as the touchstone of theory development, and more as the target of conceptually inadequate reforms. Some of the tragic consequences of, for example, the structural 'reform' movement in the educational bureaucracies of Australia in the 1980s, have been well documented (Shears, 1984; Beare, 1983; Angus et al., 1985; Macpherson, 1986a; 1987a). Educational administrators need more than a hybrid management science if they are to be educative.

Where to begin? The answer could be to reconceptualize practice as

theory-laden and therefore value-laden cultural agency (Duignan and Macpherson, 1987). Trustworthy explanations of practice would thereby presume that educational administration is:

> philosophy-in-action. Philosophy, whether it be in the mode of articulated policy utterances of inchoate or unuttered values, is daily transmitted into action through the device of organization. How? In a two-fold way. By means of administrative processes which are abstract, philosophical, qualitative, strategic, and humanistic in essence, and by means of managerial processes which are concrete, practical, pragmatic, quantitative, technical and technological in nature.
>
> (Hodgkinson, 1981: 144-5)

Hence, a research-based approach to the reconstruction of theory implies beginning with the mindsets of practitioners so that their understandings and practices can be related to their multiple contexts. Drawing in part on earlier work (Macpherson, 1987b), I now want to explore these ideas using the case of the regional directors of education in Victoria, Australia.

SETTINGS

In an election campaign speech in May 1970, Premier Bolte made the first political promises in Victoria about the regionalization of educational administration. On January 1st 1972, the Education Department implemented a new experimental structure by appointing three RDEs. They were directed to initiate the development of their roles and report to the Deputy Director General of Education.

In 1974 the number of regional directorates was expanded to eleven. The regional structure overlaid an existing divisional structure responsible for the delivery of primary, secondary and technical education to schools throughout the State. As these three 'Teaching Divisions' had long been powerful units in the Department, structural conflict soon intensified.

In May 1979, the Hon. Alan J. Hunt MLC (Minister of Education) and his Assistant Minister (the Hon. Norman Lacey MP) initiated a policy review of education for the Thompson Liberal Government. From the private

submissions of the 'Consultative Committee' (1979) and other public submissions, Hunt and Lacey developed and presented to the Parliament of Victoria, a 'White Paper' (1979) on *Aims and Objectives* .... Their 'Green Paper' (1980), which followed, explicitly proposed devolution of administrative services as a major strategy to resolve the structural conflict (Pratt, 1981). This was confirmed by the 'White Paper' (1980) on *Strategies and Structures for Education in Victorian Government Schools.*

In 1981, external consultants from PA Australia Ltd were contracted to work with selected Departmental personnel to design a new formal structure of *staff* executive directorates and *line* regional directorates. Job specifications were published ('P.A. Report', 1981). Policy making was defined as a central function, management as a regional task and operations were to be conducted at the school level. During December 1981 the top-down reappointment process began. On the 20th of January 1982, Hunt announced the names of 12 men selected (in some cases reselected) to be RDEs.

The election of the Cain Labor Government, on April the 3rd 1982, led to a much changed political context for educational administrators in the State education system. Expectations of community involvement in policy development were heightened. There was new warmth in the relationships between the Minister, the Department's personnel officers and the three major teachers' unions. The top-down reappointment processes continued but they were greatly modified to allow for wider participation at the regional level.

In early 1983, the Labor Minister of Education, the Hon. Robert Fordham MP, issued four papers: the first clarified the State Government's participative-democratic position on decision-making; the second outlined a School Improvement Plan; the third set out the role of a State Board of Education and the fourth specified policy-making roles for school councils. At the same time he foreshadowed a fifth paper about the formation of regional education boards; a promise kept just before for the 1985 election.

These dramatically changed policies for regional administration, and their ideologies, were major features of the context in which data was collected about being an RDE in 1983. It was found that RDEs' views of regionalization and restructuring reflected the impact of changed educational philosophies and political priorities in the Victorian State education system, as well as other personal experiences, since about 1970.

As the messages drawn from the literature (eg. Dobell, 1980), the methodological rationale, and the difficulties encountered are all available elsewhere (Gronn, 1982; Macpherson, 1984b; 1985a; 1985b; 1986; 1987b),

the findings can now be summarized and discussed.

BEING A REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Being a regional director incorporated different major states of being. It was about working in concurrent, complex and multiple definitions of each situation. The typology used to summarize and portray their web of belief was reductionist in subsuming other very minor roles and it was also selective in only seeking to interpret being an RDE in terms of self, position and administrative context. With these cautions in mind the data were compelling. *Being an RDE* seemed to mean *being competent and a problem-solver in four distinct realms.*

The most frequently used explanation by all informants to do with being an RDE in an administrative context was about being in 'the System'; hence 'System Man'. This reality constituted the most basic operational realm with it's attendant philosophy for all three RDEs closely studied, despite the co-existence of alternative realities. Whatever the interpretations of reality that the other realms provided, 'the System' mindset appeared to embody an objectified and traditional set of organizational norms. The values of this mode appeared to have originated in early career socialization experiences.

Whilst using 'the System's' operational philosophy, each RDE presumed 'the Department' to be a natural system, much as 'system' has been traditionally conceived in organization theory (Greenfield, 1985). Further, this presumption provided 'objective' mechanisms through which self and technical capacities were to be integrated with what were held to be 'organizational expectations'. This imagery about roles and responsibilities was also crucial to the maintenance of managerial functions, for the functionalist logic drew heavily on arguments of consequence and efficiency, and moreover, sought to justify the instrumental nature of the commitments each RDE made. This was a claim that 'the System' self was a real self, at odds with each RDE's ideal self, and yet patterned by accorded outer selves.

Fundamentally, as System Man, each RDE thought of his world as constituted of *things*: 'organization' was conceived of as reified structures, functions and roles. Able to presume the rightness of the values embodied in the metaphor of 'the System', key questions about practices tended to be about the effectiveness of technique and thus about ordering activity for efficiency. At its roots, it was a knowledge system about one's public self, position and pragmatic tasks.

The second cluster of descriptors implied being a 'Structure Man'. Repetitious use of such phrases as 'restructuring', 'supportive structures', 'the new structure' and 'local consultative structures' indicated the considerable extent to which the three informants were ostensibly engaged in sustaining, creating or elaborating patterns of institutional relationships. It also became apparent that the term 'structure' or its derivatives had to accommodate different subsets of meaning (cf. Macpherson, 1985b). Structure was defined in this mode not only as organized patterns of *relationships*, but also as organized patterns of *assumptions*. Let me explain this.

All three RDEs spoke of 'creating' and 'articulating' 'climates of opinion' and they devoted considerable attention to the maintenance and development of the assumptions that underpinned conditions, procedures and practices. They attempted to orchestrate organizational knowledge about 'public choices' using a range of strategies. All three used myth-making in attempts to control the symbolism of regionalism. One favorite phrase was used to define the regional office as a solve-all service center: the 'one-stop-shop'. Another strategy was to incessantly undermine the creation of alternative realities. The point here is that as the negotiability of structure was *assumed* by the three RDEs, when in this mode, it had to be worked at, and was thereby problematic. The mode was clearly a realm of specialist knowledge about controlling and justifying the rituals, myths and metaphors of regionalization.

It is important to note here that the realm of knowledge about 'the System' was also a specially developed system of knowledge, developed as a response to another major problem they all endured: of having to cope with the power and nature of the metaphor, 'System'. Put simply, knowledge *of* bureaucracy was as problematic to them as (but epistemologically different from) knowledge about *how the conceiving of* structure was to be *managed* to serve particular ends. This point about elaborated and specialist systems of knowledge as part of a coherent web of belief will be raised again later, when the two other realms inhabited by these RDEs have been clarified.

Third came 'Political Man'. This was the RDE explicitly 'being' in a realm of power. The fundamental concerns of each informant in this mode of being were self, alliances and persuasion. In the three informants' settings, the basic currency was shared knowledge achieved through ostensibly consensual processes and via rule by majority. However, the difference between the two realms of 'structure' and 'power' was found to lie in purposes.

Where the RDE, as 'Structure Man', was striving to aggregate ends through new *structure*, as 'Political Man' he struggled to accrue means of

influence. Power was pursued by 'Political Man' both as an end in itself and as a means to other ends. The principal strategies of the Political mode, explicitly evident and discussed as major dimensions of involvement, were traced without exception by the RDEs to an initial political trauma in education fraught with risk and yet resolved in success (after Barber, 1968, 1974).

Incidents observed and discussed at length over many months served to emphasize how each RDE worked in these three different operational realms almost simultaneously. Whilst they each regularly operated in the political mode, they also attended to the priorities and imperatives of the two other realms.

There was, however, a fourth way of knowing 'the situation' and 'being' that stood apart from these three operational modes. It was a realm of being in which the basic currency of meaning was neither things, structure, nor power. Instead, knowledge of being was *itself* the focus of attention. This fourth mode constituted a meta-category of selves and was also the time when feedback from outer selves influenced the content of thought.

The three RDEs consistently signalled, when in this reflective mode, how explanations of being in a situation were to be construed and criticized in terms of three problems: self, ideas and philosophies. It meant being self-aware, even critically self-aware; a unique characteristic of the mode. It was therefore considered an ontological meta-category with regard to the other real selves, and was distinguished by its concern for both ends *and* legitimacy. It was the realm of ethical ideas and examples abounded in the data. It also provided each RDE with a sense of being coherent.

This reflective mode of being was crucial in creating alternative knowledge about what could or should count as significant and legitimate in each of the other three realms. Whilst acknowledging that the System Man and Political Man were modes more concerned with means than ends, when each RDE was in this fourth realm he could reflect on the ideologies he had been serving in each of the other three realms without evident stress. Explanations of these multiple selves by the RDE's were pragmatic, comprehensive, natural, coherent and robust.

In some contrast to the other three major modes, the origins and evolution of the reflective mode defied easy specification. It could have been a methodological artifact of this study, although the informants' closing reflections suggested the low probability of this being the case. Instead, the comparatively rare propensity to reflect appeared to be related to perceived intensity of crises, or to the very infrequent perceived inadequacy of

the rules-for-success offered by each of the other three realms. Greenfield's statement (in Macpherson, 1984a:2) about being "forced to the edge of the cliff, as it were, struggling for your life in some sense", captures the essence of this unusual type of situation.

But what did it all mean? What was the overall picture? After months of debate with colleagues at Monash University, with the RDE's, and with my data, I gradually created a model of regional directorship grounded in the major dimensions of the three accounts mindful of other research findings on the creation of organizational knowledge (Macpherson, 1986b).

The first realization was that each of the four realms could be seen as distinct types of knowledge about of being an RDE. Each possessed a basic currency of knowledge distinctive to the realm: namely ideas about selves, things, structures or power. In the figure below, these basic currencies are represented in LARGE ROMAN typeface and are recorded nearest the intersection of the axes.

The second realization was that the the four realms could be differentiated on two dimensions, that is, in terms of their fundamental orientation to means and ends, and after Hodgkinson (1978:111; 1983), to a typology of moral judgement when problem-solving. These two continua are depicted in SMALL CAPS typeface. As the data could not sustain a strictly orthogonal relationship on a Cartesian plane, the reader might prefer to see the model as a Venn diagram of concepts on such a plane.

The third realization based on the data was that each realm had a distinguishing series of 'problems': System Man focussed on role and performance; Political Man was ever alert to alliances and influence; Structure Man was working at relationships and assumptions; while the Reflective Man considered the meanings of self in ideological and philosophical terms. These concerns are noted in **UPPER CASE SANS SERIF** typeface. The four realms were therefore summarized as 'four epistemologies' of regional directorship, each realm being an identifiably different system of knowledge with its own approach to justification.

The fourth realization was, that where the System Man mode originated in career socialization, where the Political Man mode displayed a style highly reminiscent of a first major success in organizational politics, and where the Structure mode actions reflected patterns of recent Ministerial expectations and earlier enculturation, the Reflective Man mode was slowly being mediated by attempts to review or transcend each of these forms of knowledge in order to recreate and develop a holistic synthesis of self and ideology. (These foundation experiences are shown in *UPPER-CASE ITALICS*). Quite re-

markable was how the fourth mode was used to cope with the exigencies of traumas that seemed to defy all operational rules-for-success.

To review, three personal accounts of being an RDE were synthesized and interpreted. They were used to generate a model of regional directorship as four related realms wherein particular forms of knowledge and approaches to justification were held to be pertinent at specific moments. Most importantly, however, the means-ends and good-right axes made the prime linkage in the synthesis evident: namely the centrality and dynamics of self and morality.

These RDEs each had to not only live with their own inner and the reflected outer selves, but also had to survive and operate in the everyday world of institutions, politics and structures of relationships and meanings. Being a Regional Director meant trying to reconcile each of these inner, personal, self-aware and critically reflective selves with their outer, publicly owned, reputed or career selves.

Crucial to this schema, therefore, was how, within a coherent web of belief, each of the elaborated operational knowledge systems related to major orders of problems encountered while being a regional director, namely 'the system', politics and structures. Moreover, the encountering and treatment of these problem areas correlated with systems of knowledge differentiated along pragmatic and values dimensions. The implications were, therefore, that any subsequent theory of regional directorship could neither be located within a *specific* axiology, explained in terms of any *unitary* ontology, nor conceived of as solely embodying any *particular* ideology. A holistic theory of being an RDE could not therefore rely on foundational premises or other articles of faith to justify itself, but on claims to comprehensiveness and coherence, both internally and with the empirical world. The implications of this position deserve comment, especially in the light of other recent research.

IMPLICATIONS

Practical propositions were also derived from the data of the case study. They pertain to the period of the study and suggest that:

1. regional directors offered symbolic leadership to educators (that is, indirectly through myths, structures and metaphors);

RIGHT

CAREER SOCIALIZATION

SELF - EXPECTATIONS - TECHNICAL CAPACITIES

BIOGRAPHY AND EDUCATION

SELF - IDEOLOGY - PHILOSOPHY

CONSEQUENCES

THE SYSTEM MAN
Bureaucrat, Manager, Supervisor, Official, Career/Org. Man.

REFLECTIVE MAN
Critical and Self Aware Analyst, Reviewer, Clarifier, Philosopher.

THINGS IDEAS

MEANS ENDS

POWERS STRUCTURES

POLITICAL MAN
Rhetoric, New Majorities, Issue and Metaphor Management, Games.

STRUCTURE MAN
Negotiator, Anarchist, Creator of preferred Realities and Assumptions. Myth maker.

CONSENSUS

SELF - ALLIANCES - PERSUASION

SELF - RELATIONSHIPS - PRACTICES

INITIAL POLITICAL SUCCESS

CULTURE AND CONTEXT

GOOD

2. the actions of regional directors in Victoria were denied formal community legitimation by a government ostensibly committed to such an ideal;

3. regional directorship was an office in a bureaucracy expected to collate and transmit societal expectations about education without substantial powers to decide what was educationally significant, with shrinking real resources and with diminishing influence in the politics of education; and

4. regional directorship was experienced as being morally problematic. Being personally vulnerable to conflicting plural, central and local interests, each RDE was subject to degrees of role ambiguity, powerlessness and crises of legitimation.

By 1987, Fordham's replacement, the Rt. Hon. I. Cathie MLC, had taken up his stewardship of the Education portfolio with Hunt-like style. The participative-democratic rhetoric of the Fordham era was replaced by corporate managerialist language consistent with structural-functionalism. Cathie renamed the Department of Education and relocated it as the Schools Division within the new Ministry of Education. New tiers of Ministry policy advisers were created along with metropolitan super-regions and sub-regional district offices remarkably similar to the one-time Primary Division organization.

Incumbent Regional Directors once again faced displacement. In May 1987, some of the applicants for three metropolitan and five rural posts of 'Assistant General Manager' were invited to submit a 'performance improvement plan' for their most favored region that identified 'key result areas (KRA's) and a number of Verifiable Performance Standards (VPS's) for each KRA'. The briefing paper for selected applicants (Scarlett, 1987) emphasized 'performance management' through planning, evaluation and review, and motivation and remuneration, but without mention of *any* educational values.

What had happened was that the interplay of historical, interactional, econo-political and philosophical aspects of educational administration had determined a new confluence of administrative ideologies, policies and practices, a confluence that rendered obsolete substantial parts of the RDEs' web of belief about 'being an RDE.' Embedded within this confluence were the processes that were redetermining what it will be to be an 'Assistant

General Manager'. The case of the superseded notion of 'being a Regional Director' also speaks to the complexities of supercession. In other words, just as 'being a regional director' was illuminated by the 1983 snapshot-in-context research reported here, so can the basis of a trustworthy approach to theory elaboration now be discerned.

The findings of the case study suggest that theories of practice will have to be recast to accommodate multiple administrative selves and knowledge systems that are in turn, contingent on the contexts that mediate them. This would mean that the epistemological relativity of the behavioral science approach will have to be acknowledged and reflected in explanations, but not discarded. Other knowledge systems could well be present, each with its own approach to justification. For example, it was demonstrated that the epistemological relativity of concurrent explanations of 'the situation' for three RDEs could be explained in terms of conceptual realms, fundamental concerns, ideal-typical roles, origins of ideologies, and in terms of basic orientations to means-ends and to values within a coherent totality of belief about 'being an RDE'.

This proposal fits reasonably well with the recent demolition of foundationalist epistemology in theory-building. In essence, the belief was that the trustworthiness of theories in educational administration in large part stemmed from seemingly irrefutable foundational premises about practice; premises that also appeared to endure the twin tests of research and experience. Philosophical research has instead demonstrated (Walker and Evers, 1987) that such premises in education are field-specific articles of faith that predetermine the sensing of experience, the design of research, and hence, the reconstruction of theory.

Even the fact-value distinction, central to a behavioral science account of practice and to a positivistic approach to theory-building, is at odds with how individuals learn about (say) being an RDE, and incrementally elaborate prior webs of belief (Quine and Ullian, 1978; Walker and Evers, 1984; Evers et al. in Evers, 1987; Walker et al. in Walker, 1987). Facts, values and premises are all inter-related components of each individual's web of belief, and in theory-building none of them can be set aside, or conversely, given privileged epistemic status.

CONCLUDING NOTE

There are some interesting implications of adopting non-foundational

epistemology in theory-building. For example, in recent years socially-critical interpretations of practice have gained some favor. The research reported here suggests that instead of relying on the *presumed* rightness of *one* moral posture to evaluate the practices of educational administrators, in the fashion of rule deontologists, a more content-specific, educative and pragmatically-contingent moral theory is needed. As this set of criteria would also rule out utilitarianism, it appears that the holistic pragmatism of Dewey (as interpreted by Evers et al., in Evers, 1987) could be appropriate.

Evers' moral philosophy appears particularly suitable as it systematically determines the conditions important for both non-foundational theory-building and for educative leadership, conditions that accommodate multiple elaborations of knowledge systems within coherent webs of belief. A Deweyan, holistic and pragmatic moral theory not only requires the imperatives of the sociological imagination (Mills, 1972) for administration to be intrinsically educative, but also insists on the practical imperatives of an econo-political imagination so that these practices and their consequences will continue to be sustained in a complex, mixed and modern economy.

In the passing world of the three RDEs, coping with these imperatives meant wrestling with moral problems in the diverse realms of things, power, structures and ideas. As there seems to be some timelessness about the dilemmas involved, there might be good grounds for the field of educational administration searching more rigorously for an epistemologically sophisticated theory about educative leadership.

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